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William Butler



Soldier of the Revolution.

Born

In Ireland, July, 1743.

Died

In Crawford Co. Pa., March 4th, 1837.

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W.M. BUTLER,
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Soldier of the Revolution.

To perpetuate the memory of one of the bravest soldiers of the Revolution the following true narrative is written. The material has been gathered from official documents on file at Washington in the Old War Division of the Pension Bureau, from deeds and other documents, from old family Bibles and personal recollections of the writer and others with whom the writer conversed. The writer when a boy often spent much time with the old hero and listened with intense interest to his description of battles and thrilling scenes through which he had passed.

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William Butler, the subject of this sketch, was born in Ireland "within two miles of Dublin," as he often expressed it, in July 1743. He was educated in the schools of Dublin.

Near the close of the French and Indian War he was pressed into the British Navy and against his will brought to America. On the landing of the vessel in America he deserted the Navy and escaped into the interior of Pennsylvania. The old hero often related the following story of his escape in the hearing of the writer, thrilling his boyhood heart with the exciting scenes. The vessel on board of which *Butler* had been brought from his native home anchored somewhere on the coast of New Jersey. A squad of marines, one of whom was the hero of this story, was sent ashore under the command of a Lieutenant to cut and prepare wood for use on board the vessel. After cutting the wood they went into a farm house to get food and specially cider for which New Jersey was famous. The marines stacked their guns in the hall of the house and the Lieutenant placed his sword on the hall table. All went into an adjoining room to eat their food and drink their hard cider. While the cider drinking was going on William Butler slipped out of the room, poured cider in the pans of the old flint lock guns, seized the Lieutenant's sword and ran for his life. His departure was not noticed for a little time and when they became aware of it the Marines rushed for their guns and the Lieutenant for his sword, but to little purpose, as the guns were silenced and the sword was gone. In vain they tried to fire their guns. So the swift footed ran and tried to catch their fleeing companion. Seeing them behind him in swift pursuit only lent additional strength to his limbs and courage to his heart. It was then a race for life or death, for *Butler* had once before tried

to escape by swimming ashore from the anchored vessel. One of his pursuers got so close to him as to touch Butler's back with the points of his fingers. Feeling this, Butler struck back with his sword and the point of it cut through the cheek of the open mouthed pursuer. This ended the pursuit. The old hero often said he saw the wounded marine on the streets of Philadelphia after the war, but did not make himself known.

Butler made his way to a wide river (doubtless the Delaware) buried the sword in the sandy beach and waded and swam till he reached the opposite shore. While swimming he felt burdened by the weight of a heavy double cased watch his father had given him on leaving home, and to be relieved, he dropped it in the river. The writer oft lamented with boyish grief the loss of that watch. After crossing this river Butler made his way into the interior of Pennsylvania where other Butlers from Ireland, relatives, had settled, notably the five famous Butler brothers. He seems to have settled in that portion of the state now included in Berks County, for when the Revolution broke out he enlisted for twenty-two months in a company recruited in Berks County by Capt. Henry Christ of the 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment of Rifles and Musketry. He served his full time in this company then re-enlisted for three years or during the war. For his military services the writer copies the following account from a document furnished him by the Pension Bureau at Washington.

"William Butler, when he applied for pension, April 1818, was residing in Crawford County, Pennsylvania. In May 1823 he stated his age as 80 years in July next, making his birth in July 1743. (At his death he was said to be 104 years old. This was a mistake) He was nearly 94.

"He owned land in Sadsbury Township, Crawford Co., where he was living in 1823.

"April 12, 1776 he volunteered under Capt. Henry Christ, Jr. in the 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment of Rifles and Musketry, proceeded to New York city, ordered to Long Island, where he was engaged in battle Aug. 27, 1776, retreated in the night to New York city and on the evacuation of the city Sep. 15, 1776 marched to White Plains in Westchester County, N. Y., where he was engaged in another battle Oct. 28, 1776. On the capture of Fort Washington and the evacuation of Fort Lee Nov. 16 and 18, 1776 the army retreated across New Jersey into Pennsylvania.

"Gen. Washington recrossed the Delaware river in boats, amid the floating ice, facing a driving snow storm, reached Trenton, N. J., then occupied by the British, surprised them in the early morn of Dec. 26, 1776, captured over 900 Hessians, in all of which Butler participated. His regiment was commanded by Col. Samuel Miles.

"The said William Butler continued in the United States service until the expiration of the aforesaid twenty-two months and re-enlisted for three years or during the war in the same company commanded by Capt. Marshall (Capt. Christ having resigned) in the 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment commanded by Col. Walter Stewart (Col. Miles having resigned).

"He was in the battle of Brandywine, Sep. 11, 1777 which was followed by the British occupation of Philadelphia Sep. 26, 1777.

"Butler accompanied the detachment ordered to assist in the defence of the Forts at Red Banks and Mud (now League) Island (a navy yard now located there) a short distance below Philadelphia, which were besieged in the latter part of October and November, 1777. The object of the enemy's attack was to open communication with their fleet and transports

to receive supplies of provisions and munitions of war, in which they were successful.

"He was in the camp of Washington at Valley Forge that terrible winter of 1777-78.

"He was at the battle of Monmouth, N. J., June 28, 1778 with the British army which had evacuated Philadelphia June 18, 1778, to march across New Jersey to reach New York city. The day of the battle was an excessively hot day and Gen. Washington had left the historic camp of Valley Forge Pennsylvania to intercept them.

"The said William Butler was one of the volunteers who made the midnight and surprise assault on the Fort at Stony Point on the Hudson river July 16, 1779, under Gen. Wayne which was captured and the garrison made prisoners.

"He was at the siege of Yorktown, Virginia, and capture of Lord Cornwallis Oct. 19, 1781. After which he was ordered under Gen. Wayne to the South and was in the campaigns in South Carolina and Georgia until the close of the war. He was honorably discharged at Philadelphia in August 1783.

"During his long service of seven years and four months the said William Butler was frequently drafted or transferred into different companies and regiments, having served in the Artillery commanded by Col. Thomas Proctor and Col. Harrison. At one time he served in a guard of honor or special body guard to Gen. Lafayette.* He also served as sentinel guarding Gen. Washington's tent."

"The said William Butler was twice wounded and received a pension from the State of Pennsylvania of forty dollars a year prior to receiving a pension from the United States."

After the war William Butler settled in Bald Eagle Township Northumberland (now Clinton) County near the site of the city of Lock Haven on the West Branch of the Susquehanna River.

* See note on last page.

The State of Pennsylvania gave William Butler two hundred acres of land for his services "done in the late war against Great Britain." This land located "north of French Creek and west of the Allegheny river," Butler sold to James Dunn for eighty-seven pounds sterling while living in Bald Eagle Township, Lycoming County (then just organized), March 15th, 1796.

After selling this land he with his wife and daughter removed to Crawford County, Penn., and settled in 1798 on the farm where he lived till his death March 4, 1837. He was buried in the old grave yard at Harmonsburg, beside his son, James Butler, who died in 1835. He had four daughters born to him while living on his farm.

William Butler, the old hero, was a man of extraordinary strength and courage, that knew no fear whether he had to fight with fist or gun. The following incidents illustrate his great physical strength. On his hundredth birthday (as has often been stated) he walked from his farm to Meadville and returned a distance in all of sixteen miles. In the fall previous to his death they were threshing buckwheat in the field on a floor made by beating and rolling the ground smooth after the manner of Bible days. The old hero and his grandson Joseph M. Butler, then thirteen years of age, with the old fashioned flails threshed to completion a flooring of buckwheat as it was brought from the field. As they finished the old man remarked, "Well done for two boys, one thirteen and the other a hundred and three." Few men at that age have accomplished such feats.

On his removal from Lycoming County he left behind him two grown sons James and William. These two sons came over the Allegheny Mountains, married and settled in Black Lick Valley between Chest-

nut Ridge and Laurel Ridge, near Armagh in Indiana County, Penn.

These sons partook of their father's physical and mental characteristics. Both were men of giant strength and of determined will and courage.

James Butler was a furnace man, pattern maker and moulder. He worked in the Old Ross Furnace, the first iron furnace ever built west of the Allegheny mountains. He married Martha Clarke, daughter of William Clarke, Esquire, or "Squire Clarke" as he was commonly called. "Squire Clarke" came from the north of Ireland. He was well educated and a man of great wealth in those early days. He was a civil engineer. So was his son, Thomas Clarke. He bought many thousand acres of land lying in Black Lick Valley and on the mountains around. He improved many farms in said valley, built flouring-mills and saw-mills and did much for the settlement of the country. Black Lick M. E. Church and graveyard remain to this day a monument of his benevolence. A number of the farms are still owned and occupied by Squire Clarke's descendants.

William Butler worked for a time with his brother James. He married Sally Dias whose mother was a Dillon, of an old aristocratic family in Ireland. By her he had two sons, John and Samuel. John died in his youth. Samuel was brought up by his mother's parents and still lives 77 years old, a life-long, practical, prudent, and well-to-do farmer. William Butler married for his second wife Elizabeth, daughter of Joseph McMurtry of Crawford Co. who belonged to an old Scotch family early settled in New Jersey. The McMurtrys took an active part in the Revolutionary war. Joseph's three brothers were soldiers in the Revolution.

William lived on part of his father's farm and there his children were born. By this second marriage he had two sons and two daughters. The two sons and one daughter still survive.

After settling in Crawford Co. William Butler followed transporting goods by flat boats or barges between Meadville and Pittsburgh. These barges were poled up and down French Creek and the Allegheny River. In 1830 he took a boat load of supplies of various kinds down the Allegheny, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans. While at New Orleans he was murdered and for some two or three years his family did not know what had become of him. Some three years had passed when his brother James left his family of ten children in Black Lick Valley where most of them were cared for by the Clarkes, their mother having died, and proceeded down the river to New Orleans.

He there learned all that is known about his brother William's death and burial. After gaining all the information he could he returned to Crawford Co. to report to his father and sister-in-law the sad news. Two days after his return he died suddenly on his father's farm and was buried in the old graveyard at Harmorsburg. It was several years before his family in Black Lick learned of James' death.

William Butler's two younger children, a son named William David and a daughter were cared for and brought up by their mother's parents, the Mc Murtrys.

From these two sons, James Butler and William Butler, have descended a numerous posterity. Most of them now living are in Allegheny, Westmoreland, Indiana and Cambria Counties. Some are scattered over the West and some are east of the Allegheny Mountains. The writer of this narrative has during

the past two years visited and talked with at least one hundred and fifty direct descendants of William Butler the soldier of the Revolution through his two sons James and William.

James Butler left in Indiana county a family of ten children, six sons and four daughters. Their names indicate their mother's love of the Bible. They are William, Abner and Solomon (twins), Elizabeth, Caleb, Martha and Ellen (twins), Ruth, Jesse and Washington. William, Caleb, Jesse and Washington are now living. William has one son and four daughters, all married and with families. Caleb has three sons and two daughters married and with families. One daughter died leaving two sons and a daughter. Jesse has six sons and one daughter. The daughter and four sons are married and have families. One daughter died leaving a son. Washington has two sons and four daughters. The sons and one daughter are married and have families.

William Butler has three sons living, Samuel, Joseph and William D. Samuel has a family of five sons and two daughters. His two daughters and three sons are married and have families. Joseph Butler has two daughters married and with families, and one son unmarried. William D. Butler has three sons and two daughters, one son and one daughter are married and have families.

William D. Butler was graduated at Jefferson College, Pa., and for forty years past has filled important positions in the Public Schools of St. Louis, as Professor of Ancient Languages in the High School, Principal of Grammar and Intermediate Schools, and as Assistant Superintendent.

Caleb Butler inherits his father's and his grandfather's physical strength and courage and has transmitted the same to his three sons, William, Elmer,

and Jesse. While in Johnstown where Caleb lives, now over seventy years of age the writer had related to him the following story. Caleb has been employed in the Cambria Iron Works at Johnstown for over forty years. He is a quiet and peaceable man not given to quarrelling. Some years ago among the thousands of employes in those Iron Works there was a Welshman, a man of such great physical strength and quarrelsome disposition that none dare molest him. He was the bully and terror to the men in the works and constantly quarrelling. All feared and shunned him. He abused and nagged Caleb Butler till he could endure it no longer. Being roused by the bully's abuse Caleb turned on him and gave him such an unmerciful pounding that the bully ever afterwards slunk away in cowardice and left the works. So pleased were the proprietors with Caleb Butler's act that they presented him fifty dollars, for downing the boastful giant. Eversince Caleb Butler has held unchallenged the championship of the Cambria Iron Works which employ from five to seven thousand men. His three sons employed in the same works in responsible positions are fully competent to take their father's place.

William Butler, the soldier of the Revolution has now living bearing the name Butler seven grandsons, the oldest 83 and the youngest 67, all men of great physical strength in their younger days. He has twenty-one great-grandsons also Butlers and sons of the fifth generation more than the writer has the names of. In the above numeration the writer has taken no account of the daughters born in the several Butler families and their equally numerous posterity.

The writer's interest has been confined to those bearing the name Butler, the male descendants bearing that name. It will be difficult to find a hardier race of men than the Butlers of this family or one

more numerous. This Butler family have characteristic traits which pass down the whole line of descent. Determined will and the courage of their convictions mark them all. A strain of mechanical genius runs through them all. James Butler's sons were all skilled mechanics or machinists.

Washington Butler, now an accomplished farmer, rendered important service to the Government in mechanical skill in the war of the Rebellion. A grandson of James Butler has run the engine of the Penn. "Limited" between Pittsburg and Altoona for twenty-five years without an accident, and still fills his post.

William Butler's sons, Joseph and William D. were both skilled mechanics. A son and daughter of William D. possess this talent in a marked degree. The son is a graduate of Princeton College, New Jersey, and is now principal of one of the largest St. Louis Public Schools. The daughter is an artist of marked ability and teaches in the Mary Institute a Department of Washington University of St. Louis.

For energy and activity in commercial life there are few better examples than the two great-grandsons, sons of Samuel Butler, J. C. and S. M. Butler, constituting the firm of J. C. Butler & Co. of Denver, Colorado. J. C. Butler educated at Allegheny College, is largely interested in mining.

In religious belief all the posterity of James Butler and his brother William are Protestants, though the brothers themselves and their father were Catholics. The father was only a nominal Catholic for he was a Free Mason. James Butler's wife was a Methodist and all her posterity Methodist also. Jesse, now a successful farmer, one of James' sons, is quite a distinguished leader in the Methodist Conference to which he belongs.

William Butler's son Samuel is a Lutheran and so his children are Lutherans also. William's sons, Joseph and William D. are, the former a Methodist and the latter a Presbyterian following the faith of his mother. The religious belief of the Butler family is a marked proof of God's rewarding a pious mother's faith.

The Butlers are a sober, temperate and industrious people and patriotic to the core. Three of the grandsons and seven great-grandsons served their country in the army of the Union in the war of the Rebellion.

In politics all are Republicans.

For sixty years the Butler's of Crawford County lost all knowledge of the Butler's in Indiana County, owing to the peculiar death of the two brothers James and William away from their families. Not till Aug. '93 were the lost links of the family chain discovered and a full knowledge obtained of all the descendants.

The writer's persistant search has brought all to light and knowledge.

The above narrative has been written for the Historical Society of Meadville, Pa., by a grandson of the old hero of the Revolution.

July 22, 1895.

W. M. D. BUTLER,

St. Louis, Mo.

NOTE.—William McArthur of Meadville, Pa. shortly before his death in a letter to the writer, confirms this statement. He says, when Gen. Lafayette visited Meadville in 1824, that he, then a boy of thirteen, stood near Lafayette having just shaken hands with him when someone told the Gen. of the old soldier, William Butler, living near. The Gen. remembering him, spoke of him and expressed an earnest desire to see him. The old hero, through failing memory, mistook the day and came to Meadville the day after the Gen. had left. Bitter disappointment grieved the old man so that he often afterwards mourned the failure to see the General.